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CONCERNING TWO CZECH PUBLICATIONS  
ON THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF INDUSTRIAL REGIONS

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Comparisons drawn between the scope and methods of European ethnography on the one hand and those of American cultural anthropology on the other tend to emphasize the rather obvious differences between the two at the expense of some interesting parallel influences to which both have been increasingly subject during the last several decades. The boundaries of the "primitive" world have been shrinking at an unprecedented rate as a result of proliferating technology and worldwide sociopolitical transformations, forcing the American cultural anthropologist to begin to shift his attention from tribal societies to peasant communities and to the processes of culture change. In Europe, where field research has been limited for the most part to the study of the traditional folk (peasant) culture of the ethnographer's country, the steady urbanization and modernization of the countryside has brought the subject of ethnographic research under similar reconsideration. Once the deepest wounds from World War II had closed and European ethnographers could fully resume their activities, a thorough reappraisal of the goals and methods of ethnographic research became inevitable. The options discussed ranged from the pursuit of microethnographic treatment of the ever-diminishing folk culture survivals to the sociologization of ethnography, with the implication of its gradual demise.

A steadily growing number of European ethnographers have committed themselves to still another alternative--the ethnographic study of contemporary times (volkskundliche Gegenwartsforschung). While this research interest could take a variety of directions, studies of workingmen's lifeway and of the culture of urban and industrial areas today constitute the most significant new ethnographic genre in several European countries.

The purpose of this report is to discuss two important contributions of Czech ethnographers toward the understanding of urban and industrial areas within the broader framework of the so-called ethnography of contemporary times (etnografie současnosti) or ethnography of workaday life (etnografie všedního dne). Given Czechoslovakia's rich tradition of ethnographic research, coupled with the avowed socialist orientation of the country and its professed interest in the workingman, this brief survey, I hope, will be of value to the American anthropologist, who has recently entered the field of urban anthropology himself.

One result of the postwar efforts of Czech ethnographers to subject some of the industrial regions of the country to comprehensive treatment was the volume Kladensko.<sup>1</sup> Under the direction of Olga Skalníková, staff members of the Institute for Ethnography and Folklore of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences began field research for this work in 1953; the volume appeared in print in 1959.

The stated purpose of the principal contributors to the volume

was to assess the share which the largest and most progressive component of the Czech nation--the working class--had had in the transformation and maintenance of the national culture, and to set forth an ethnographic model which would develop within the appropriate sociocultural context those aspects particularly characteristic of an industrialized region. The nature of the task--for Czech ethnographers without precedent--posed several fundamental problems. Foremost among them was the necessity to redefine the scope of folklore to subsume the products of the spiritual culture of the working class, for it appeared that such classical criteria of traditional storytelling as anonymity of authorship cannot be rigidly applied to some of the purposeful semiliterary activity of the Kladno miners. There was further the need to consider newspapers, books, radio, and various cultural and political events as presenting new thematic materials which were replacing the traditional religious or fabulous forms with realistic narratives drawn from personal experience or based on concrete happenings.

Kladno with its environs was selected for a number of reasons: ethnically, it has always been a homogeneous Czech region, unlike some of the other highly industrialized areas; furthermore, the industrial growth of the area could be traced continuously from the end of the eighteenth century; and finally, since Kladno has not exerted the strong pull on the population living on its perimeter as have other industrial concentrations, its study was to provide a methodological bridge with the well-established exploration of the

village milieu.

The success of the undertaking may best be described as somewhat mixed. The introductory part by Skalníková (7-79), which presents an account of the life of the Kladno miners toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, is informative and competent as far as it goes. The basis for the description was an extensive body of data obtained from some 150 families of miners. This information was supplemented by a careful perusal of archival materials, local newspapers, available (but sporadic) ethnographic literature, and several works of fiction by authors intimately familiar with the life of the Kladno workers. However, considering the fact that field work was an important aspect of the investigation, it is difficult to refrain from expressing one's disappointment that the description of the lifeways of the region was not brought up to the fifties, but stopped early in this century. As a result, the setting provided for the rest of the volume, which is devoted primarily (and hence somewhat disproportionately) to folklore, is not fully adequate.

The most valuable part of the volume is Jech's contribution concerning folk narration of the Kladno region (85-160), supplemented by Spilka's analysis of miners' humor (167-201) and an anthology of local folk narratives and humor (205-81).

The reasons for the traditional neglect of workingmen's folklore have not been peculiar to Czechoslovakia and are not difficult to identify. The great majority of folklorists have dealt with folk

literature as though it were a closed category, and hence have conceived of it statically. Comparable forms originating among the working class, which are generally below the classical folk standards formally and thematically, simply remained outside the purview of collectors. Accordingly, it may be of interest to review briefly Jech's approach to his assignment.

After a survey of the available direct and indirect sources of the regional narratives, the author discusses the methods of collecting in the field. Although the emphasis was on the materials current among the workingmen, the scope of collecting was purposefully kept broad. Altogether about 2,000 texts were secured, some in a number of variants, comprising substantially the entire repertoire of the best raconteurs of the region.

Following Jech, the narrative repertoire of the Kladno region is categorized below according to themes and genres and according to distribution and provenience.

I. According to themes and genres:

A. Narratives with themes from workingmen's life

1. Traditional

- a) legends (concerning the origin of mines)
- b) tales of superstition (with supernatural characters)

2. Nontraditional

- a) reflecting significant political events or concerning outstanding personalities (genre:

- stories from life)
    - b) reflecting aspects of social conditions
      - (genres: stories from life, anecdotes, humorous tales, and parodies of traditional tales)
  - B. Narratives with themes other than from workingmen's life
    - 1. Traditional
      - a) fairy tales (novellas, tales of magic, and animal tales)
      - b) local legends
      - c) tales of superstition
      - d) saints' legends
      - e) "classical" anecdotes and humorous tales
    - 2. Nontraditional
      - a) nontraditional "fairy tales" (transitional to stories from life)
      - b) stories from life
      - c) anecdotes and humorous tales (with both political and imaginary themes, some obscene)
- II. According to distribution and provenience:
- A. According to social distribution
    - 1. Current among members of the working class
    - 2. Current outside the working class
  - B. According to thematic provenience

1. From the Kladno region
  - a) occurring throughout the entire region
  - b) limited to a portion of the region
2. Supraregional or nationwide themes
  - a) occurring throughout the entire national collectivity
  - b) limited to one or several regions
3. International themes

Of the narratives dealing with themes from the lives of workingmen, those dating from about the eighties of the last century up to 1945 are by far the more numerous. They deal predominantly with the miners' struggle against the mining authorities, priests, and wealthy farmers; with humorous episodes from the miners' lives; the origin of miners' nicknames; tragic events resulting from mining operations; and typical local figures, especially that of the trickster miner Varhulík. The more recent narratives, reflecting the period since 1945, are made up primarily of comparisons of contemporary with earlier times, the successes or shortcomings of mining operations, and the activities of brigades and shock workers.

Apart from an element of social urgency, the workers' prose relates to the traditional materials in several ways. Borrowed traditional themes are adapted or analogous themes are invented to fit their new setting; these same processes apply also to motifs. Another source of new narratives is the tendency to parody traditional forms. And, just as with traditional materials, some narratives



current in the Kladno region originated outside it.

A significant portion of Jech's contribution is an analysis of the linguistic character of the narratives. The author discusses the extent and function of elements both from the literary language and from the regional or social dialect. Description of grammatical, syntactic, and lexical aspects of the Kladno folklore is usefully supplemented by a comprehensive vocabulary of miners' slang.

In the last two sections, dealing with "the life of narratives in the folk collectivity of the Kladno region" and with the regional storytellers, Jech rounds out his excellent treatment of miners' folklore with some detailed sociofolkloristic observations. Among the topics he discusses are the sources on which narrators claim to have drawn for their materials; the extent of variation and stability among the narratives; the occasions considered particularly suitable for storytelling (most of the materials come from miners rather than smelters, whose intensity of work did not favor the telling of stories); the makeup of the audience; and the social functions of the narratives. Concerning the storytellers, the author takes up their relationship to the narratives, analyzes the 264 raconteurs who served as informants according to age, sex, and social background, and categorizes them into types according to their repertoire and narrative style.

Even from this cursory overview of Jech's treatment of folk narration in the Kladno region it must be quite evident that his is an unusually comprehensive study which does not stop with a taxonomic

description of the materials but seeks to examine them within a broad historical and social framework. The author thus sets a very high standard for others to follow in the study of regional narrative traditions. The undertaking of such exhaustive studies as have just been exemplified has assumed particular importance now that the number of good storytellers is rapidly thinning--not only in the Kladno region but elsewhere also.

In his analysis of miners' humor, Spilka begins with a definition and brief characterization of the subject matter. He then proceeds to describe and analyze it both according to the contents--life in the mines, in the home, and in the community, stories from World War I and the German occupation of 1939-1945, and minor adventures of the trickster miner Varhulík--and according to its formal and stylistic features.

The anthology of regional narratives consists of humorous pieces and samplings of traditional tales (legends and fairy tales) and of stories from life.

The second contribution to Kladensko to be singled out for more detailed comment is Karbusický's survey of workers' songs in the Kladno region (283-443). It consists of an analytical treatment of the subject, supplemented by an anthology of ninety-four well-annotated transcriptions of representative songs and by indices and a bibliography of sources.

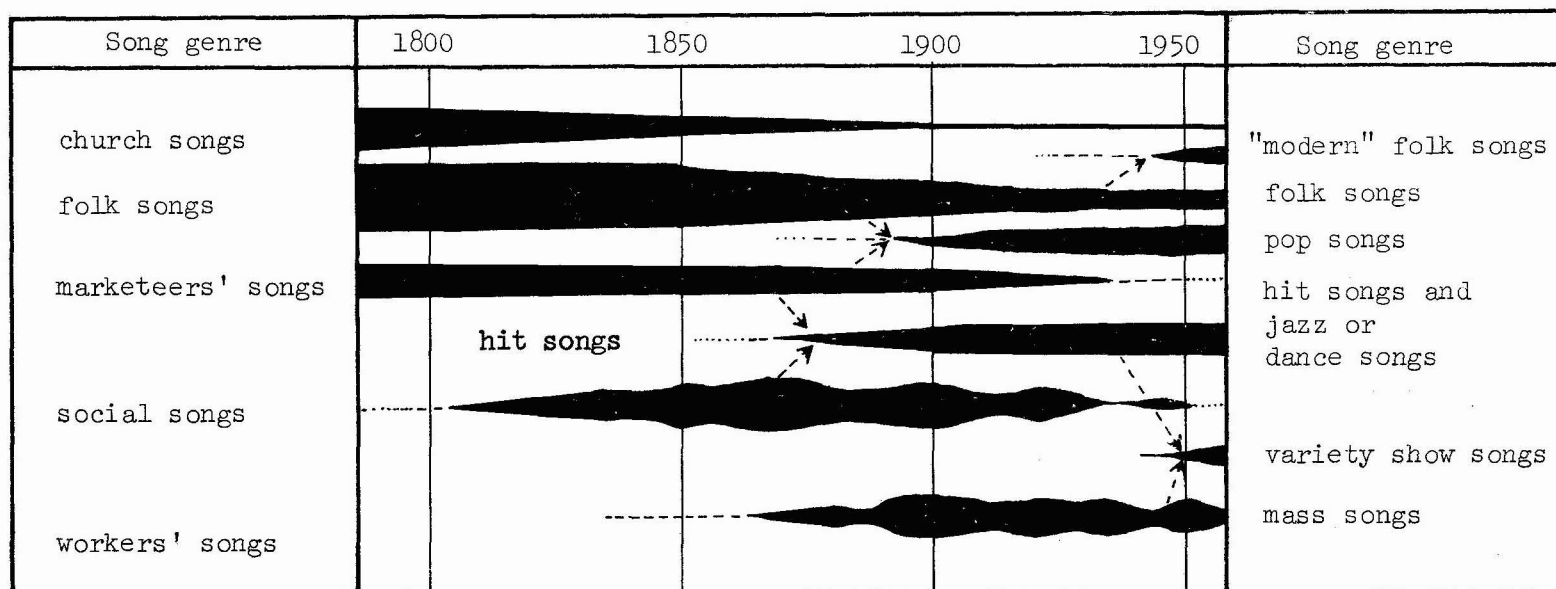
Karbusický first outlines the main stages in the development of workers' songs during the last hundred and fifty years. The oldest

layer--religious songs--began giving way to occupational songs around the middle of the last century. The first sizeable group of songs, adumbrating the socialist song repertoire of more recent times, are what Karbusický terms the "folkloric songs" of the Kladno miners. He defines the songs of this category as those, "whether written by known or unknown composers, which by virtue of their form--drawing as they do largely on the tradition of folk poetry--have the requisites to become folk songs and which thematically reflect the living conditions, views, feelings as well as the social and socialist tendencies of the workingmen, and which have also been actively and creatively received among them." The author next examines the socialist songs of the Kladno workers and the influence of these songs on the rise of their class consciousness, and then follows the development of the songs from World War I up to the period of his field work.

Rather than extending the concept of the folk song to include forms originating and occurring among the nonpeasant members of the national collectivity, Karbusický, following some of the older Czech folklorists, prefers to classify songs according to their "bearers," that is, according to the social classes which produce and receive them. Thus, leaving themes aside, he recognizes three main categories of songs: folk songs of the peasants--comprising epical, lyrical, ceremonial, and dance songs; social songs of the bourgeoisie--with epical, lyrical, and patriotic songs; and workers' songs--according to origin either folkloric or artificial. According to the author, song genres should not be considered in isolation, particularly

when studied in historical perspective. To show the mutual relationships and approximate intensities of various genres in the Czech-speaking territory since about 1800, Karbusický has prepared the following diagram:





Today, the three basic categories of songs--those of the peasants, bourgeoisie, and workers--are merging, and there is a tendency to classify songs according to genre. But while the number of genres has increased over the last hundred years, the intensity of song activity has been steadily diminishing. Karbusický's contribution to our knowledge of Czech musical folklore has not only been in his intensive collecting, but in his sound methodological and analytical scholarship as well.

In his survey of miners' bands (447-83), Nušl discusses their development from about the middle of the nineteenth century on; their uniforms, personnel, and repertoire; the status of the band musicians in the mining communities and their musical education and activities; the functions of the miner's bands in community life; the founding and dissolution of bands; other orchestral ensembles in which the miners participated; and the overall significance of the miners' bands for the region.

The volume concludes (487-581) with Janáčková's well-annotated anthology of forty-three additional Kladno songs (ceremonial, lyrical, and epical), introduced by a report on the field collecting activity and a brief characterization of the published selection.

This review of Kladensko has concentrated on its two major contributions. In the volume as a whole, one misses a discussion of some of the other forms of local traditions--proverbs, superstitions, works of graphic and plastic arts, and dance, to mention a few--but even as it stands, uneven in coverage, it is an important source of

information for a region and an important segment of the Czech population which heretofore has been only very sketchily explored.

The second volume to be reviewed here, Rosicko-Oslavánsko,<sup>2</sup> appeared two years later. It was coauthored by Karel Fojtík, an ethnographer, and Oldřich Sirovátka, a folklorist; both began their field research for this work in 1953.

The monograph is devoted to the small mining district of Rosice-Oslavany, situated about 18 miles southwest of Brno, the capital of Moravia. The region is rich in miners' traditions, which had been developing there since the middle of the eighteenth century. In order to reconstruct the underlying folk culture of the region, to trace its changing patterns, and to define the role played by the workingmen's culture in these changes, it was necessary to make extensive use of archival sources in addition to the information collected in the field. Fojtík has shown remarkable skill in locating and utilizing a great variety of documents for this purpose.

He first lays the groundwork for the entire volume by reviewing in some detail the development of the region's collieries and the socioeconomic changes accompanying their development. He further discusses the extent of regional agriculture, the exclusive activity of the population--except for the associated trades--at the time coal mining began. The dominant crops of the area were cereals, rye in particular. The keeping of sheep, which was widespread in the region during the eighteenth century, came to an end when some of the land was no longer allowed to lie fallow. The keeping of cows remained of

some importance until the end of the first quarter of this century. Cows were pastured together and cared for by a herdsman hired on a communal basis. For the past twenty years, the tendency has been for workingmen to engage less and less in agriculture on the side because it is no longer considered imperative to supplement incomes with homegrown produce.

The villages began losing their peasant appearance during the second half of the nineteenth century. By that time the workers formed such a substantial part of the village populations that the focal point shifted from the village common to the larger and more populous workers' quarters. In the construction of family houses, workers sought a more efficient ground plan for use with small building plots. With the establishment of a miners' construction cooperative after World War I, workingmen's houses frequently were the best-constructed buildings in the village.

The influence of the working class on the culture of the population was strongly reflected in family and social life. The "closed" nature of the villages in the eighteenth century was sustained for some time by a pervasive network of godparenthood, which embraced workingmen's families of local provenience as well as the local peasantry. However, profound changes were wrought at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a rapid upsurge of mining operations brought in great numbers of workers from distant places. The distinctions developing between the local population and the immigrants were further sharpened by their economic disparity. In



workingmen's families the status of women and the relationship between parents and their children came to stand in sharp contrast to the patriarchal authority of the farmer. Thus, as early as the fifties of the last century, whenever workers looked for rooms in exchange for their farm labor, they tended to approach a stranger in preference to a close relative.

The two-hundred-odd outsized pages of Fojtík's contribution to the volume are replete with valuable information and documentation skillfully assembled to give a "historical-ethnographic picture" of the mining district. The author insists that the study of the culture of workingmen cannot be limited to them alone but must be undertaken in the context of the whole regional population and against the full background of history. Fojtík belongs among those rare ethnographers who possess the patience and have the command of their material to practice what they preach. He has thus set a model which many will wish to emulate but few will ever reach.

With the exception of folk songs, collection of folkloristic materials prior to Sirovátka's field research in the region was very sporadic, and concentrated almost exclusively on rural communities. The first task facing Sirovátka (and Fojtík), therefore, was to record what folk songs, folktales, legends, superstitions, anecdotes, dances, children's games, nursery rhymes, and the like were still remembered by or current among all segments of the regional population. Besides a generous sampling of the whole region, three particular communities were surveyed exhaustively--

one with a predominance of farming population, one with a large majority of the population involved in mining operations, and one with a mixed population.

The songs and narratives of workingmen of the Rosice-Oslavany region clearly fall into two basic categories: materials from the formative period of the mining culture, roughly up to the nineties of the last century, and materials from the beginning of the local socialist movement until the end of World War II. The distinguishing features of the two groups are more thematic than formal and are far more pronounced in the songs than in the narratives. Thematically, folklore from the first period reflects the strong influence of religious ideology, deals with subjects from mining life, or makes use of fabulous or superstitious elements. The folklore of this period is intimately connected with that of the traditional village. Folklore of the second period marks a sharp departure from the past. It is anticlerical, rich in social(ist) content, and it trades off fantastic elements for a realistic view of life. From a formal point of view, too, it departs from the patterns of traditional village folklore, most noticeably so in the songs.

Originally, workingmen's compositions made use of traditional materials, to a greater or lesser degree, in one of several ways: they simply adapted older traditional pieces to their own purposes; they utilized individual elements of traditional pieces and developed them independent of their sources; or they created new compositions in the spirit and style of traditional folklore but without the use

of any concrete elements of the source material. By the beginning of this century, the influence of tradition had substantially diminished. Workingmen's songs, in particular, ceased to be folkloristic and assumed mass-culture character and function.

One important feature of workingmen's folklore has been its low persistence, due primarily to the individualistic character of the material. Most narratives or songs enjoyed a relatively short life, and some existed in the repertory of one raconteur (or singer) only. Such a circumstance severely limited their artistic development with the result that they remained for the most part in their original raw form.

Together with the contributions of Jech and Karbusický to Kladensko, Sirovátka's account forms an important methodological and material addition to a field which as yet is relatively under-represented in ethnographic literature. Because the emergence of workingmen's folklore may well be seen as a step toward an even more general (and still weaker) counterpart of traditional folklore in today's mass consumer culture (whether in Czechoslovakia or elsewhere), the efforts of our Czech colleagues deserve greater attention than they are usually accorded.

#### NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The main contents of the volume are (in translation) as follows: "An Ethnographic picture of the life of the Kladno miners toward the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century" by Olga Skalníková (7-79); "Folk narration of the Kladno region" by Jaromír Jech (85-160); "Miners' humor of the Kladno region" by Josef Spilka (167-201); "Anthology accompanying the studies of folk narration and miners' humor" (205-81); "Workers' songs of the Kladno region" by Vladimír Karbusický (283-443); "Miners' bands in the Kladno region" by Bohumír Nušl (447-83); and "Folk tradition and artificial elements in the Kladno songs" by Irena Janáčková (487-581).

<sup>2</sup>Fojtík, Karel, and Oldřich Sirovátka. Rosicko-Oslavansko; život a kultura lidu v kamenouhelném revíru [The Rosice-Oslavany region; the life and culture of a coal district]. Prague: Československá akademie věd, 1961.

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(13-35); "Agriculture and trades" (36-58); "Workingmen's dwellings and their development" (59-85); "Workingmen's fare and its development" (86-99); "Dress and adornment" (100-8); "Social structure and relations; annual festivities and customs" (109-56); "Family and family relations; family festivities and customs" (157-79); "Education" (180-7); "Concluding statement" (188-90)--all by Karel Fojtík.

"Sources and methodology for the research of folk songs and narratives" (209-15); "Folklore of the Rosice-Oslavany region" (216-23); "Traditional, marketeers', and artificial songs" (224-42); "Traditional narratives" (243-62); "Workingmen's songs and verses" (263-71); "Workingmen's narratives" (272-81); "Main features of workingmen's songs and narratives in the Rosice-Oslavany region" (282-89); "Samples of workingmen's songs, verses, and narratives" (290-327)--all by Oldřich Sirovátka.